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VOID RIVALS
image
#18

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HEAR ME NOW, PREMIERE ZALILAK. THESE TRIALS ARE THE PATH ZERTA HAS CHOSEN FOR YOU.
THE PAIN YOU ARE EXPERIENCING IS WHAT YOU DESIRED WHEN YOU REQUESTED I SHOW YOU A PATH FORWARD.
IT IS A GIFT.
IT IS AN HONOR TO RECEIVE IT.
:NGGH.:
I THANK YOU, AND I THANK ZERTA.
YOUR THANKS ARE RECEIVED. NOW FOCUS ON THE TASK BEFORE YOU.

I AM AS FOCUSED AS I NEED TO BE.
THIS TASK WILL NOT BE DIFFICULT FOR ME.
I SEE THAT NOW.
WHAT A DEEP SADNESS I FEEL FOR THE MANY YEARS YOUR POTENTIAL WAS WASTED. AT LONG LAST YOU WILL BE THE RULER ZERTONIA NEEDS.

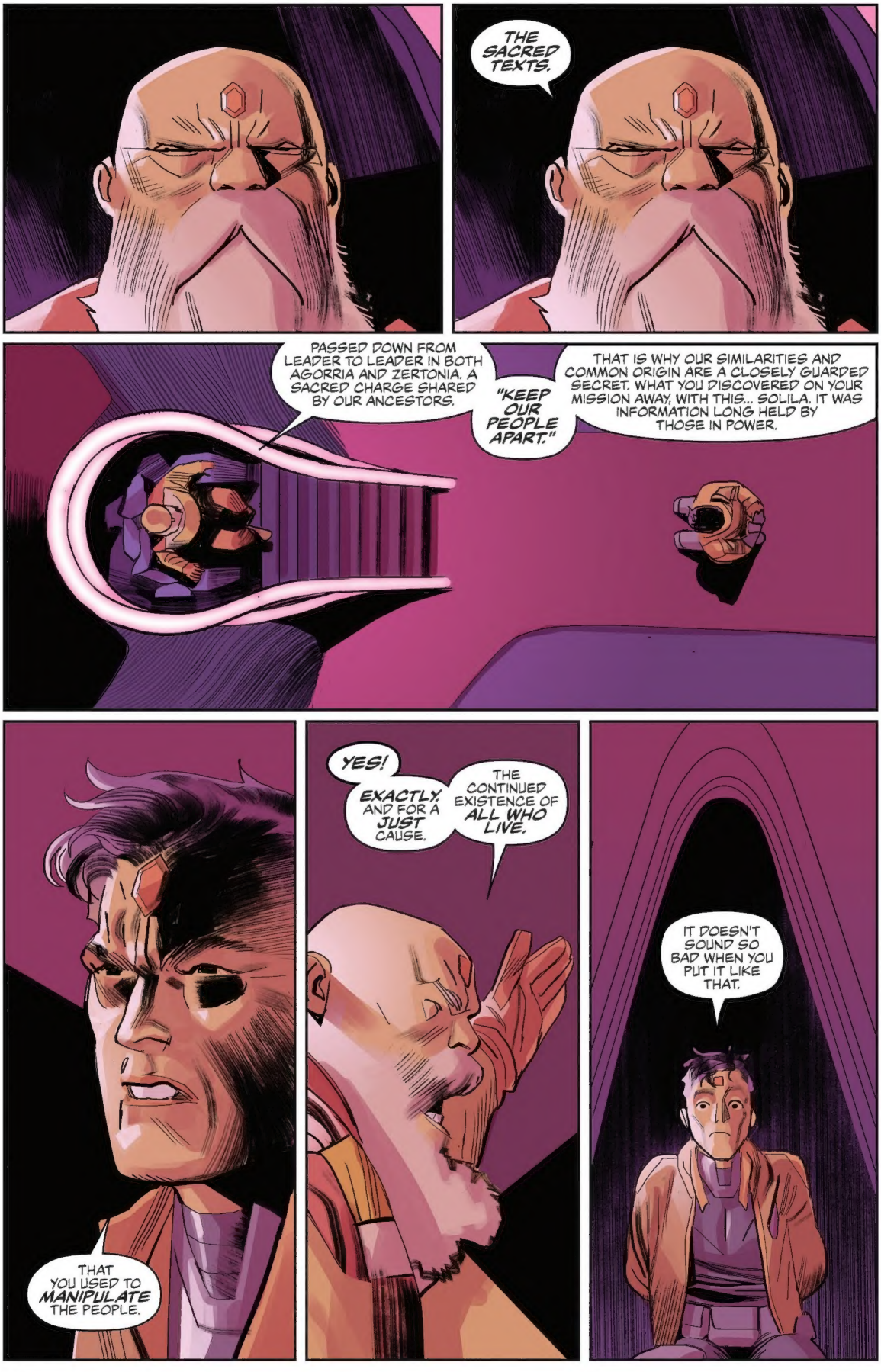
ZERTONIA.
STEP AWAY FROM MY THRONE.
I WILL NOT ASK AGAIN.
PROXIMUS. YES... UH.
RIGHT AWAY... SIRE.

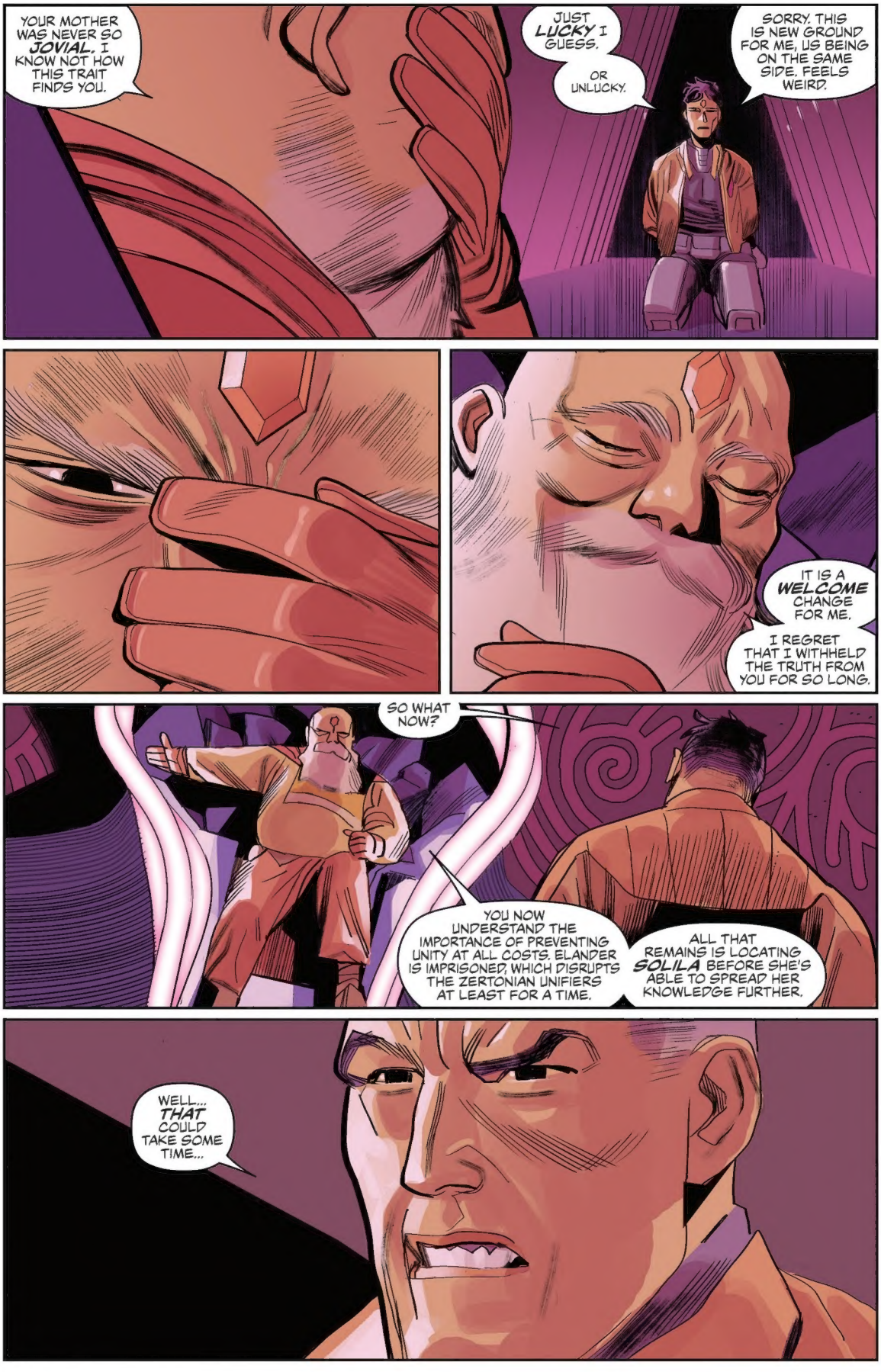
LEAVE US.
WHAT NOW, SIR?
AT LONG LAST, ULTUM...
I REST.

AGORRIA.

MY GOD.
THAT'S... ALL TRUE?
IT IS.
ALL OF IT?
EVERY SINGLE WORD.

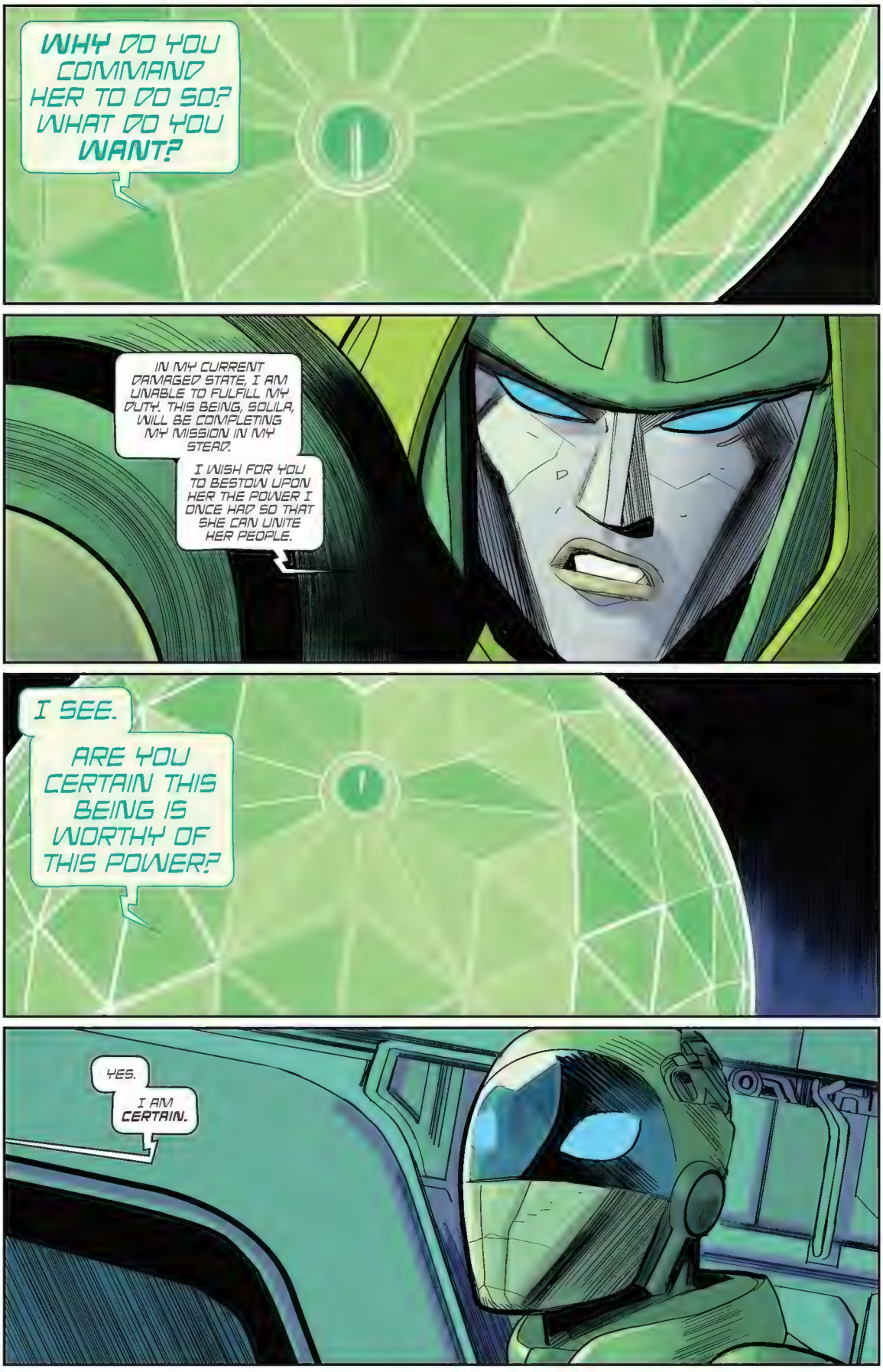
YOU WERE VERY CLEAR THAT I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO DOUBT YOU... BUT...
HOW DO YOU KNOW?


THE SACRED TEXTS.
PASSED DOWN FROM LEADER TO LEADER IN BOTH AGORRIA AND ZERTONIA. A SACRED CHARGE SHARED BY OUR ANCESTORS.
"KEEP OUR PEOPLE APART."
THAT IS WHY OUR SIMILARITIES AND COMMON ORIGIN ARE A CLOSELY GUARDED SECRET. WHAT YOU DISCOVERED ON YOUR MISSION AWAY, WITH THIS... SOLILA. IT WAS INFORMATION LONG HELD BY THOSE IN POWER.
THAT YOU USED TO MANIPULATE THE PEOPLE.
YES! EXACTLY. AND FOR A JUST CAUSE.
THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF ALL WHO LIVE.
IT DOESN'T SOUND SO BAD WHEN YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT.


YOUR MOTHER WAS NEVER SO JOVIAL. I KNOW NOT HOW THIS TRAIT FINDS YOU.
JUST LUCKY I GUESS.
OR UNLUCKY.
SORRY. THIS IS NEW GROUND FOR ME, US BEING ON THE SAME SIDE. FEELS WEIRD.
IT IS A WELCOME CHANGE FOR ME.
I REGRET THAT I WITHHELD THE TRUTH FROM YOU FOR SO LONG.
SO WHAT NOW?
YOU NOW UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTING UNITY AT ALL COSTS. ELANDER IS IMPRISONED, WHICH DISRUPTS THE ZERTONIAN UNIFIERS AT LEAST FOR A TIME.
ALL THAT REMAINS IS LOCATING SOLILA BEFORE SHE'S ABLE TO SPREAD HER KNOWLEDGE FURTHER.
WELL... THAT COULD TAKE SOME TIME...

WHY DO YOU ACTIVATE ME ONCE MORE?

IT IS **AT MY COMMAND** YOU ARE REACTIVATED, VECTOR THETA.


WHY DO YOU COMMAND HER TO DO SO? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
IN MY CURRENT DAMAGED STATE, I AM UNABLE TO FULFILL MY DUTY. THIS BEING, SOULA, WILL BE COMPLETING MY MISSION IN MY STEAD.
I WISH FOR YOU TO BESTOW UPON HER THE POWER I ONCE HAD SO THAT SHE CAN UNITE HER PEOPLE.
I SEE.
ARE YOU CERTAIN THIS BEING IS WORTHY OF THIS POWER?
YES.
I AM CERTAIN.

AH. SO YOU'RE NOT LOCKED AWAY IN THE NEXT CELL. I'M HAPPY FOR YOU, DARAK.
DOES THAT MEAN YOU BETRAYED ME?
NO, DIRECTOR ELANDER, I WOULD NEVER BETRAY YOU. EVEN IF MY FATHER BELIEVES YOU BETRAYED OUR PEOPLE.
SO THAT'S IT THEN?
I AM THE ONE WHO BETRAYS OUR PEOPLE? IT'S NOT YOUR FATHER AND HIS ARCHAIC WAYS? HE FEARS UNITY BECAUSE OF SOME ANCIENT TEXTS... SUPERSTITIOUS NONSENSE.
HAVE YOU READ THE SACRED TEXTS?
NO.
BUT I KNOW WHAT THEY SAY.
FEAR OF AN IMAGINED LOOMING CATASTROPHE IS NOT ENOUGH TO KEEP OUR PEOPLE APART AND TO ALLOW HALF OF THEM TO LIVE IN SQUALOR AND MISERY.

BUT WHAT IF IT'S TRUE?
IT'S NOT.
HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE?
BECAUSE IT'S ABSURD.
TRUTH IS, I LOVE AGORRIA AND ITS PEOPLE. I JUST HATE KNOWING THE ZERTONIANS ARE SUFFERING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RING. TRYING TO END THEIR SUFFERING IS WORTH WHATEVER PUNISHMENT I AM TO RECEIVE.
YOU SHOULD KNOW, I RECEIVED A SIGNAL FROM THE UNIFIERS BEFORE I WAS IMPRISONED. THE ZERTONIANS SOMEHOW GOT THE SAME SCHEMATICS YOU BROUGHT US FOR THIS ENERGON WELL...
AND THEY GOT THEM FIRST. THEIRS IS ALREADY OPERATIONAL. KANELA REPORTED IT'S ALREADY CHANGING THINGS FOR HER PEOPLE.
YOU MIGHT WANT TO TELL YOUR FATHER HIS WEAK AND DIMINISHED OPPONENTS WILL SOON NO LONGER BE EITHER.
UNITY MAY SOON BE THE ONLY OPTION TO AVOID A GROWING CONFLICT.
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE ANY IDEA HOW THEY GOT THE SAME INFORMATION YOU BROUGHT TO US... WOULD YOU?

IT IS DONE. THE POWER IS GRANTED.
I RETURN NOW, TO THE HOLLOW COMFORT OF OBLIVION.
YOU HAVE EARNED YOUR REST, VECTOR THETA.
HOW ARE YOUR GIFTS RECEIVED, SOLILA?
I FEEL... STRANGE. NOT QUITE MYSELF.
SOMEHOW... MORE.
THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE.
TO BEGIN YOUR MISSION, WHERE DO YOU WISH TO START?
START?
IDEALLY, I'D BE ABLE TO CHECK IN WITH DARAK. HE IS AN ALLY THAT CAN HELP BRING ABOUT UNITY.

IF YOU WISH TO SEE HIM, ALL YOU NEED DO IS WILL IT INTO BEING.
WHAT?! WHAT IS HAPPENING?!
SOLILA, MY CHILD.
THE SACRED RING IS AT YOUR COMMAND.

I DON'T TRUST THIS. HOW DO WE KNOW THIS ENERGY SOURCE ISN'T GOING TO SABOTAGE US IN SOME WAY?
I SAW THIS ENERGON SAVE SOMEONE'S LIFE JUST BY APPLYING SOME OF IT TO THEIR MIND EYE.
SPRINGER CALLED IT AN ENERGON PORT. THE SACRED TEXTS SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THAT?
SO I'M MEANT TO JUST GET USED TO THIS TONE FROM YOU, NOW THAT WE'RE ALLIES?
PROBABLY FOR THE BEST!

THE THRUSTERS IN YOUR SHIP WON'T BE STRONG ENOUGH TO GET US PAST THE EVENT HORIZON. THAT'S WHY I'VE BEEN TRAPPED HERE.
THEY SAY THEY CAN CONVERT A LAUNCH SLED TO WORK WITH YOUR SHIP.

I KNOW **ELITA-1** WILL BE GLAD TO HAVE US BACK. THINGS ARE... NOT GREAT ON CYBERTRON.

ANY WORD FROM **OPTIMUS PRIME** OR ANYONE FROM HIS SQUAD?
NO. STILL LOST.

WELL... WE CAN LOAD THIS SHIP FULL OF ENERGON AND RETURN HOME. THAT'LL KEEP US GOING FOR A FEW MORE MONTHS AT LEAST.

YOU HAVE BEEN GONE A WHILE. WITH HOW ELITA-1 RATIONS THINGS... A SHIP LOAD WOULD LAST US AT LEAST A YEAR.

WOW. THINGS **ARE** DIRE

I'M READY. WHAT IS THIS MISSION?
YOUR INTEL FROM FORMER DIRECTOR ELANDER TROUBLES ME. ZERTONIA HAVING A FUNCTIONING ENERGON WELL BEFORE US COULD HAVE GIVEN THEM AN ADVANTAGE.
LESS SKEPTICAL ON THE POTENTIAL OF ENERGON, I SEE.
...
EVEN WORSE, I'VE NOT BEEN ABLE TO MAKE CONTACT WITH PREMIERE ZALILAK IN SOME TIME. THIS IS VERY UNUSUAL.
I NEVER FULLY TRUSTED HIM, BUT HAVING NO AWARENESS OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN ZERTONIA IS UNPRECEDENTED DURING MY RULE.
YOU'RE SENDING ME TO ZERTONIA IN A JUMP JET? FATHER, WE WERE GETTING ALONG SO WELL. I THOUGHT YOU WERE STARTING TO CARE FOR MY WELL-BEING.
I PROPOSE LITTLE MORE THAN A QUICK FLYBY. FAST ENOUGH THAT YOU DON'T ENGAGE THE ENEMY IN ANY WAY.
YOU'LL TAKE READINGS, GET FOOTAGE AND RETURN HOME. IT WON'T BE PERFECT, BUT IT'LL GIVE US A PICTURE OF WHERE THINGS ARE AT.
FRANKLY, I WORRY ZALILAK HAS BEEN OVERTHROWN AND THEY'VE DESCENDED INTO CHAOS.
THAT WOULD BE--

WHAT IN--?!
SOLILA?!
WAIT-- THAT IS YOU, ISN'T IT?
IT IS.
BUT I HAVE CHANGED. NOW SHAPED BY DIVINE PURPOSE.

SOUNDS PAINFUL.
BUDDY, YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE THE THINGS I'VE SEEN.
QUIET.
WHERE AM I? WHO IS THIS?
YOU'RE IN THE AGORRIAN CAPITAL. THIS IS MINISTER DULIN, OUR LEADER... AND... MY FATHER.
SIR, IT IS AN HONOR TO MEET YOU. I HAVE NO DOUBT DARAK HAS BEEN ABLE TO EXPLAIN OUR SITUATION TO YOU.
IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE BEGIN THE PROCESS OF UNIFYING OUR PEOPLE AT ONCE.
SO... ABOUT THAT...

YOU! YOU TRAITOROUS WRETCH! YOU HAVE INVADED OUR SACRED SPACE! YOU ARE UNWELCOME HERE!
YOU UNLAWFULLY WIELD OUR HANDROID-- WHICH IS FORBIDDEN!
YOU HAVE BROKEN MORE AGORRIAN LAWS THAN I CAN LIST! DARAK! YOU ARE TO EXECUTE THIS SPY--
AT ONCE!

TALK TO THE HANDROID

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO VOIDRIVALS@SKYBOUND.COM

And BOOM, we've reached the end of another incredible arc with Robert, Lorenzo, Patricio and Rus once again absolutely crushing it! Editor Ben Abernathy, at your service, and excited to dive into the mail bag with the Battle Beast himself, Robert Kirkman!

Before we dive into the mail, I want to take a moment to thank co-creator and artist Lorenzo De Felici for his EXCELLENT work on the past 18 issues. And under some less than ideal circumstances, as I'm often late with scripts. Every amazing thing you've seen in these issues from the many worlds we've seen, to the amazing new characters and vehicles and so much world building has all come from his brain. It's been an absolute blast to have the honor of working with him again and I look forward to our next collaboration.

If you haven't gathered by now, this will be Lorenzo's last issue of the series (for now) as he takes a sabbatical to develop some other stellar work. I'm hoping he'll grace these pages with his talents again sooner rather than later, if we're lucky.

Next issue we'll be welcoming aboard the mega-talented Conor Hughes who I couldn't be more thrilled to be working with. You've seen his work on quite a few Void Rival's covers already, so I'm sure you're as excited as I am. I've been a fan of Conor's work for quite some time, but more on him next issue.

NOW let's dive into the mail!

. . . . . .

Hi V-R team!

I don't ever really write fan mail, nor do I really read it much at the end of books that have it, but I just really had to let you know that I really appreciate all you're doing with Void Rivals, and I don't mean the whole Transformers/G.I. Joe universe. I only watched those casually when I was a kid in the 80s, and it is pretty cool to see them taking new life in these pages, but what really keeps me tied to this comic series is the multifaceted story and crisp and expressive artwork. I've been reading comics since the early 90s and I've started and stopped lots of series. Void Rivals had me hooked right away, and again, not because of the overall Energon Universe. It's the whole enemies becoming friends thing, hope for an alliance between two peoples, tip-toeing around a potential romance, true sci-fi fun, and the really unique ideas without seeming gimmicky. Every issue draws me in every month! I have a hard time with on-going series--I forget what happened in the last month--but not with V-R. I always remember and I'm always eager to read it! I really appreciate the hard work you put in to make it accessible with limited knowledge of its ties, as well. Amazing work overall! A true sci-fi masterpiece and a testament to what comics can be!

Sincerely,
Mike Flynn

Thank you for writing in, Mike, and for your continued support and enthusiasm for VOID RIVALS. We wouldn't be closing out our 18th issue without fans like you. And I hope you check out this particular letter column to see your printed letter!

Yes, thanks Mike! Obligatory response to say that while I appreciate the love for VOID RIVALS, you really should give the wider Energon Universe a quick look. What the teams are doing in both TRANSFORMERS and G.I. JOE is really cool. If you like VOID RIVALS I do feel like you'll enjoy those books!

. . . . . .

Dear Kirkman and Company,

How?! How could you do that to Skuxxoid! Don't you know he has a wife and kids to provide for! All jokes aside, if you'd told me a couple of years ago when this book started that the death of a character like Skuxxoid would be an emotional gut punch, I would have called you crazy, but here we are at Void Rivals #16. I would argue this is the most emotional death in the EU thus far. We only had Rock 'N' Roll for 6 issues, and Ratchet for only 7 or 8 issues, but we've had Skuxxoid since issue 2, that's 15 issues! Not to mention he was the VR front runner for the FCBD Special. He had a sad arc and I'm sad to see him go, but I do find it poetic justice that he died gun in hand, on his Rockeroid, just like we met him all those months ago.

Until next time, Roll Out!
Bret M.

I share your sentiments with our dearly departed Skuxxoid, Bret, and I hope he finds the peace in death he sought so desperately in life. R.I.P. (Rest In Pieces)

I think it's become pretty clear how much we love Skuxxoid around these parts. At times he's fighting for the lead spot in

this series! His death is a real bummer... but I promise you'll enjoy the next issue... sad as it might be!

. . . . . .

Hello Void Rivals Team,

Life-long Skuxxoid fan here, I've been absolutely loving the comic so far. The overall setting is very close to that of Transformers Season 3 (the best season); which I think has been severely underrepresented. This comic, along with the others in the Energon Universe, have pretty much completely rebooted my view of comics as a medium. Anyways, I just finished reading issue 16. I may never forgive you.

Keep up the great work, all!
Arren Meuchel

As long you keep reading and enjoying the Energon Universe, Arren, I can live without your forgiveness! (But I think you'll forgive us heh heh)

Loving all this Skuxxoid love! He was a cool visual I remembered from watching the Transformers show as a kid and I must say... he's really grown into one of my favorite characters ever... which, I know, makes my treatment of him seem strange. It is what it is. You guys really need to get our next issue.

. . . . . .

I must admit. I'm still impressed by the new "Visionaries Easter Egg" in Void Rivals #17, besides Zerta Trion's true identity, as well as the next arc of Daniel Warren Johnson in Transformers, the end of the first arc in G.I. Joe, and the upcoming A Real American Hero: Silent Missions one-shots. (About the last series, I still try to understand it, because it continues from the original comics by Marvel and IDW).

Anyway, thank you for what you're doing. The future toy line for SDCC 2025 is sublime.

See you next time.

Sincerely,
Fico

No comment!

. . . . . .

Dear Handroid,

I love, love, love Void Rivals! However, there are also lots and lots of characters, and sometimes it's hard to keep track of everyone's name.

Any chance we can get a "Roster" page at the beginning or end of each issue showing a picture of the main characters and their names?

Keep rocking it!
Jesse

Hmm... an interesting idea.

I wouldn't be opposed to something like that. At the very least, maybe a nice feature for a quickly approaching anniversary issue.

. . . . . .

Howdy fellas!

So, I sent in a letter before, way back around issue #9 or so. It got published in issue #11, actually. I was the lad who very nervously asked about the Junkions.

Considering the cover previews that got released yesterday (I'm writing this on the morning of the 19th) I just had to send in another letter.

I'm beyond overjoyed. I actually don't think I can express how excited I am to see Wreck-Gar and the other Junkions and to find out how they play a part (however small it may be, I'll still appreciate it) in the story. I genuinely didn't think it would happen, but Robert's unusually optimistic reply the first time gave me a lot of hope. I don't think a lot of people can say that the Junkions are their favourite characters in Transformers, but I can, and I'm absolutely over the moon! Safe to say I'll be doing my best to pick a physical copy for my shelf!

Also, I've been convinced to start reading and watching Invincible based on how much I've enjoyed the Transformers and Void Rivals comics, and though I'm late to the game with that franchise, I'm loving it so far! Lots of luck and support for the next issues of the Energon universe!

From Joey

All I can say, Joey, is YOU'RE WELCOME!

This is all great to hear, Joey! And thanks for trying INVINCIBLE! To any fans out there, we are planning for this Energon Universe to stand the test of time. That's our goal. So, if all goes according to plan... you'll see... pretty much everything eventually. It may take time... but don't worry Cosmos fans... we'll get there eventually!

. . . . . .

And once again, we draw this letter column to a close... be sure to pick up the ENERGON UNIVERSE SPECIAL/FCBD issue in a few weeks to get a hint of what's to come... and then VOID RIVALS #19 kicks off a thrilling new arc and as Robert mentioned, the arrival of Conor Hughes on art... it's gonna be EPIC!

-Ben

It's going to be great!! So much cool stuff on the horizon! Hoo boy! I need to get back to work on these scripts! Yikes!!

-Robert

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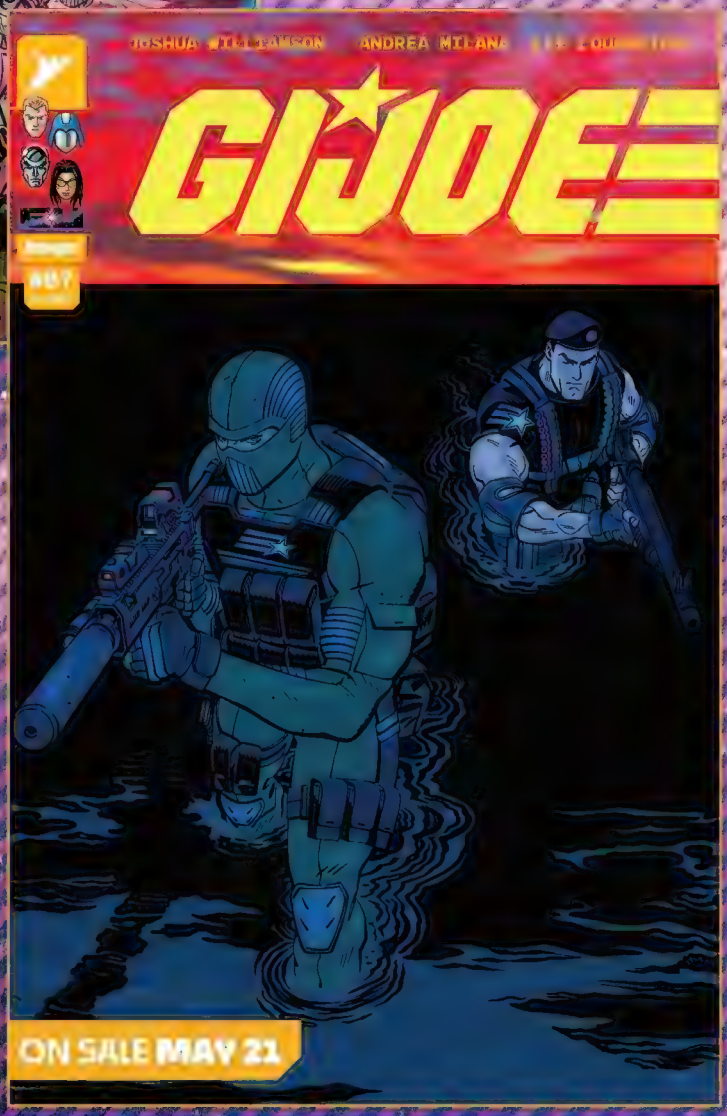
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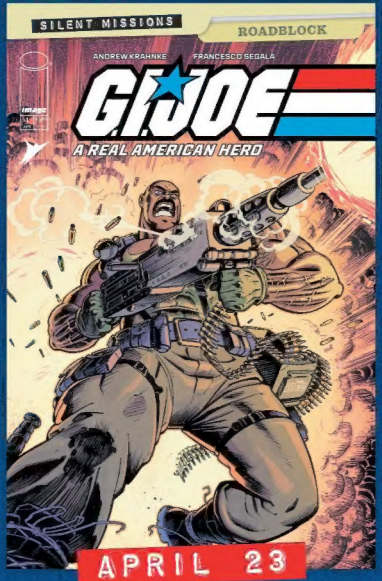

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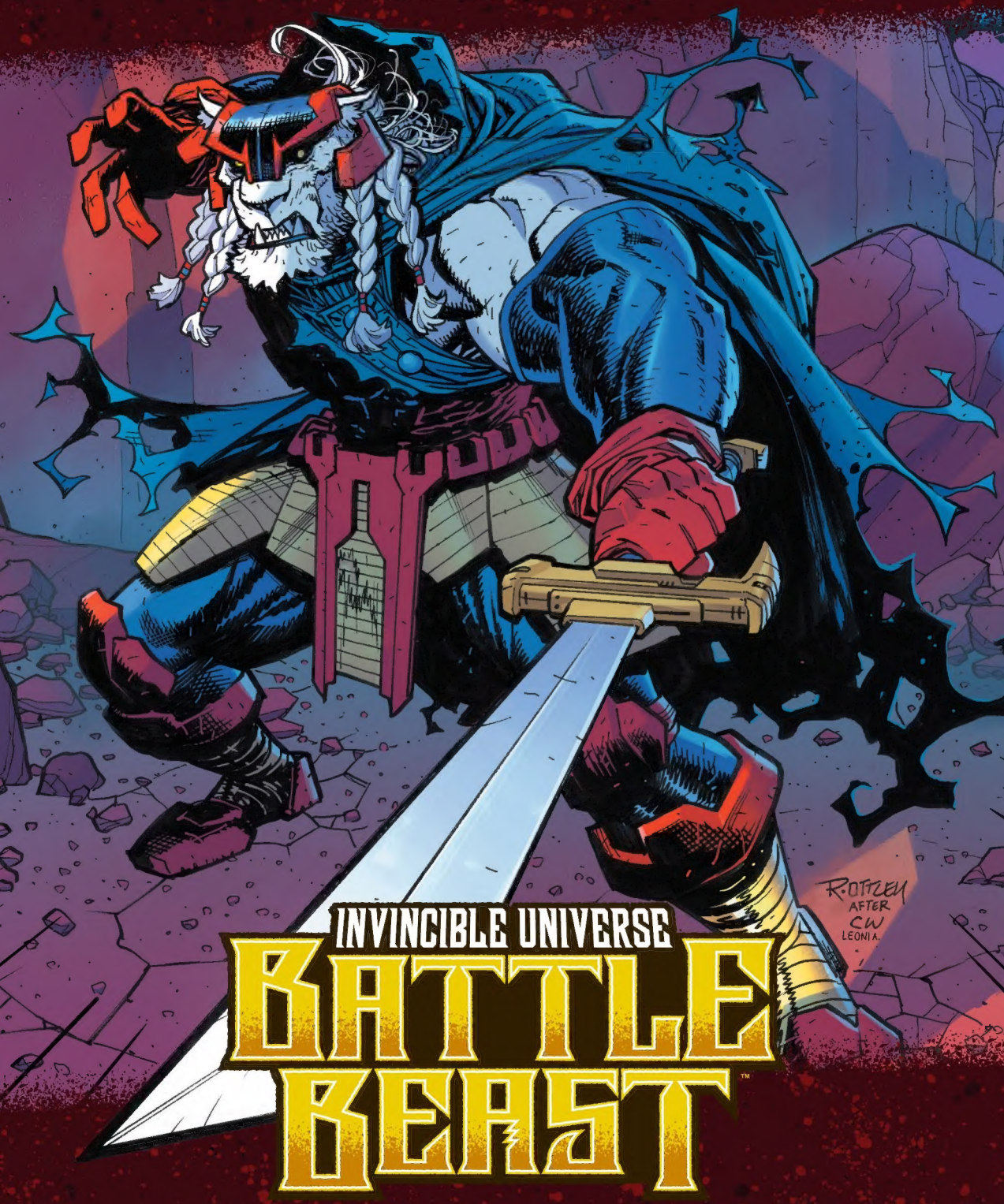

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